

# Veterans Bulletin

Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Sonny Perdue  
Governor

Pete Wheeler  
Commissioner

Georgia Veterans...guardians of liberty  
Winter 2005-2006



*I Pledge Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America  
and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God,  
indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

# June 14 is National Flag Day

## Fly Our Flag Proudly!



New Year's Day .....	January 1st
Martin Luther King's Birthday .....	3rd Monday in January
Lincoln's Birthday .....	February 12th
Washington's Birthday (President's Day) .....	3rd Monday in February
Easter Sunday .....	Variable
Patriot Day .....	September 11th
National Day of Prayer .....	1st Thursday of May
Mother's Day .....	2nd Sunday in May
Armed Forces Day .....	3rd Saturday in May
Memorial Day ( <b>half-staff until noon</b> ) .....	Last Monday in May
Flag Day .....	June 14th
Independence Day .....	July 4th
Labor Day .....	1st Monday in September
Constitution Day .....	September 17th
Columbus Day .....	October 12th
Navy Day .....	October 27th
Veterans Day .....	November 11th
Thanksgiving Day .....	4th Thursday in November
Christmas Day .....	December 25th
Election Days and such other days as may be proclaimed by the President of the United States.	



## The History Of Flag Day

The Fourth of July was traditionally celebrated as America's birthday, but the idea of an annual day specifically celebrating the Flag is believed to have first originated in 1885. BJ Cigrand, a schoolteacher, arranged for the pupils in the Fredonia, Wisconsin Public School, District 6, to observe June 14 (the 108th anniversary of the official adoption of The Stars and Stripes) as 'Flag Birthday'. In numerous magazines and newspaper articles and public addresses over the following years, Cigrand continued to enthusiastically advocate the observance of June 14 as 'Flag Birthday', or 'Flag Day'.

On June 14, 1889, George Balch, a kindergarten teacher in New York City, planned appropriate ceremonies for the children of his school, and his idea of observing Flag Day was later adopted by the State Board of Education of New York. On June 14, 1891, the Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia held a Flag Day celebration, and on June 14 of the following year, the New York Society of the Sons of the Revolution, celebrated Flag Day.

Following the suggestion of Colonel J Granville Leach (at the time historian of the Pennsylvania Society of the Sons of the Revolution), the Pennsylvania Society of Colonial Dames of America on April 25, 1893 adopted a resolution requesting the mayor of Philadelphia and all others in authority and all private citizens to display the Flag on June 14th. Leach went on to recommend that thereafter the day be



known as 'Flag Day', and on that day, school children be assembled for appropriate exercises, with each child being given a small Flag.

Two weeks later on May 8th, the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution unanimously endorsed the action of the Pennsylvania Society of Colonial Dames. As a result of the resolution, Dr. Edward Brooks, then Superintendent of Public Schools of Philadelphia, directed that Flag Day exercises be held on June 14, 1893 in Independence Square. School children

were assembled, each carrying a small Flag, and patriotic songs were sung and addresses delivered.

In 1894, the governor of New York directed that on June 14 the Flag be displayed on all public buildings. With BJ Cigrand and Leroy Van Horn as the moving spirits, the Illinois organization, known as the American Flag Day Association, was organized for the purpose of promoting the holding of Flag Day exercises. On June 14th, 1894, under the auspices of this association, the first general public school children's celebration of Flag Day in Chicago was held in Douglas, Garfield, Humboldt, Lincoln, and Washington Parks, with more than 300,000 children participating.

Adults, too, participated in patriotic programs. Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the

Interior, delivered a 1914 Flag Day address in which he repeated words he said the flag had spoken to him that morning: "I am what you make me; nothing more. I swing before your eyes as a bright gleam of color, a symbol of yourself."

Inspired by these three decades of state and local celebrations, Flag Day - the anniversary of the Flag Resolution of 1777 - was officially *established* by the Proclamation of President Woodrow Wilson on May 30th, 1916. While Flag Day was celebrated in various communities for years after Wilson's proclamation, it was not until August 3rd, 1949, that President Truman signed an Act of Congress designating **June 14th** of each year as **National Flag Day**.



*Flying proudly 365 days a year at the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Milledgeville.*

*Georgia Veterans...guardians of liberty*



# Flag Etiquette

## STANDARDS of RESPECT

**T**he Flag Code, which formalizes and unifies the traditional ways in which we give respect to the flag, also contains specific instructions on how the flag is not to be used. They are:

- The flag should never be dipped to any person or thing. It is flown upside down only as a distress signal.
- The flag should not be used as a drapery, or for covering a speakers desk, draping a platform, or for any decoration in general. Bunting of blue, white and red stripes is available for these purposes. The blue stripe of the bunting should be on the top.
- The flag should never be used for any advertising purpose. It should not be embroidered, printed or otherwise impressed on such articles as cushions, handkerchiefs, napkins, boxes, or anything intended to be discarded after temporary use. Advertising signs should not be attached to the staff or halyard
- The flag should not be used as part of a costume or athletic uniform, except that a flag patch may be used on the uniform of military personnel, fireman, policeman and members of patriotic organizations.
- The flag should never have placed on it, or attached to it, any mark, insignia, letter, word, number, figure, or drawing of any kind.
- The flag should never be used as a receptacle for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.
- When the flag is lowered, no part of it should touch the ground or any other object; it should be received by waiting hands and arms. To store the flag it should be folded neatly and ceremoniously.

The flag should be cleaned and mended when necessary.

When a flag is so worn it is no longer fit to serve as a symbol of our country, it should be destroyed by burning in a dignified manner.

### Displaying the Flag Outdoors

When the flag is displayed from a staff projecting from a window, balcony, or a building, the union should be at the peak of the staff unless the flag is at half staff.

When it is displayed from the same flagpole with another flag - of a state, community, society or Scout unit - the flag of the United States must always be at the top except that the church pennant may be flown above the flag during church services for Navy personnel when conducted by a Naval chaplain on a ship at sea.

When the flag is displayed over a street, it should be hung vertically, with the union to the north or east. If the flag is suspended over a sidewalk, the flag's union should be farthest from the building.

When flown with flags of states, communities, or societies on separate flag poles which are of the same height and in a straight line, the flag of the United States is always placed in the position of honor - to its own right. ..The other flags may be smaller but none may be larger.

..No other flag ever should be placed above it.

..The flag of the United States is always the first flag raised and the last to be lowered.

When flown with the national banner of other countries, each flag must be displayed from a separate pole of the same height. Each flag should be the same size. They should be raised and lowered simultaneously. The flag of one nation may not be displayed above that of another nation.

### Raising and Lowering the Flag

The flag should be raised briskly and lowered slowly and ceremoniously. Ordinarily it should be displayed only between sunrise and sunset. It should be illuminated if displayed at night.

The flag of the United States of America is saluted as it is hoisted and lowered. The salute is held until the flag is unsnapped from the halyard or through the last note of music, whichever is the longest.

### Displaying the Flag Indoors

When on display, the flag is accorded the place of honor, always positioned to its own right. Place it to the right of the

speaker or staging area or sanctuary. Other flags should be to the left.

The flag of the United States of America should be at the center and at the highest point of the group when a number of flags of states, localities, or societies are grouped for display.

When one flag is used with the flag of the United States of America and the staffs are crossed, the flag of the United States is placed on its own right with its staff in front of the other flag.

When displaying the flag against a wall, vertically or horizontally, the flag's union (stars) should be at the top, to the flag's own right, and to the observer's left.

### Parading and Saluting the Flag

When carried in a procession, the flag should be to the right of the marchers.

When other flags are carried, the flag of the United States may be centered in front of the others or carried to their right. When the flag passes in a procession, or when it is hoisted or lowered, all should face the flag and salute.

### The Salute

To salute, all persons come to attention. Those in uniform give the appropriate formal salute. Citizens not in uniform salute by placing their right hand over the heart and men with head cover should remove it and hold it to left shoulder, hand over the heart. Members of organizations in formation salute upon command of the person in charge.

### The Flag in Mourning

To place the flag at half staff, hoist it to the peak for an instant and lower it to a position half way between the top and bottom of the staff. The flag is to be raised again to the peak for a moment before it is lowered. On Memorial Day the flag is displayed at half staff until noon and at full staff from noon to sunset.

The flag is to be flown at half staff in mourning for designated, principal government leaders and upon presidential or gubernatorial order.

When used to cover a casket, the flag should be placed with the union at the head and over the left shoulder. It should not be lowered into the grave.

Courtesy of <http://www.usflag.org>

# Veterans Get Nearly \$81 Billion in Historic FY 07 Plan

## Landmark Budget Includes Largest Increase in Health Care Spending in History

VA News Release  
February, 2006

Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson announced that President Bush will seek a record \$80.6 billion in the fiscal year 2007 budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), with the overwhelming majority of these resources targeted for health care and disability compensation. The FY '07 proposal represents an increase of \$8.8 billion, or 12.2 percent, above the budget for 2006.

"Veterans are a priority. That's why the President is proposing this historic budget with a landmark increase to continue the best health care and vital benefits to those veterans who count on VA the most," Nicholson said. "With the support of Congress, we can take care of the needs of our newest generation of combat veterans, while honoring our commitment to veterans of earlier eras."

The FY '07 budget proposal calls for \$38.5 billion in discretionary funding — mostly for health care. This budget contains the largest increase in discretionary funding for VA ever requested by a President. For health care alone, the President's request is an increase of \$3.5 billion (or more than 11 percent) over the FY '06 level. The budget proposal also would provide \$42.1 billion in mandatory funding, mostly for compensation, pension and other benefit programs.

### FY '07 Budget Highlights

This budget proposal ensures that the Department will be able to care for those veterans who count on VA the most.

With this budget proposal, the President, working in partnership with Congress, will have increased health care funding for veterans by 69 percent since FY '01.

The budget continues the President's commitment for VA to work closely with the Department of

Defense to ensure that service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and their families receive timely, high-quality services and benefits.

VA will be able to care for an estimated 5.3 million patients. With this budget, the Department will continue providing world-class care for its high-priority patients, including over 100,000 veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

The FY '07 budget proposal includes \$457 million for the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) program, bringing the total Department investment to nearly \$3 billion since FY '04. The FY '07 proposal includes funding for the continuation of medical facility projects in Long Beach, Calif.; and Denver, Colo., and funds new projects

in American Lake, Wash.; Milwaukee, Wisc.; Columbia, Mo.; and St. Louis, Mo.

The FY '07 budget request calls for a total investment of almost \$3.2 billion in mental health services, which is \$339 million above this year's level. This budget proposal ensures a full continuum of care for veterans with mental health issues, to include comprehensive treatment for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The FY '07 budget proposal requests \$1.4 billion for prosthetics and sensory aids, a \$160 million increase over FY '06.

Funding for non-institutional long-term care would increase by nearly 10 percent over FY '06, with a total investment of \$535 million in the President's proposed budget.

*Continued on page 5*

*In January, Governor Sonny Perdue officially swore Commissioner Wheeler into another four-year term as Georgia Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. It was the members of the current State Veterans Service Board that unanimously elected The Commissioner to his fourteenth consecutive term to oversee the day-to-day operations of the department. His new term runs through the Spring of 2009. "Commissioner Wheeler remains the Georgia veteran's number one advocate," said VSB Vice Chairman Fred T. Fincher, Sr. of LaGrange during the nomination process. "He continues to be called upon by veteran officials at all levels for advice and counsel — his knowledge and experience on issues affecting veterans is tremendous and unsurpassed."*



*Commissioner Wheeler began his service to the Georgia Department of Veterans Service in 1949. He has served as the agency's department head under 11 governors.*



The FY '07 budget proposal includes over \$78 million for national cemetery construction projects, including funds for cemetery expansion and improvement at Great Lakes, Mich.; Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas; and Saratoga, N.Y. Resources are also included for the development of master plans for six new national cemeteries in Bakersfield, Calif.; Birmingham, Ala.; Columbia-Greenville, S.C.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Sarasota, Fla.; and southeastern Pennsylvania. The budget also includes \$32 million in grants for the construction of state veterans' cemeteries.

### Ensuring a Seamless Transition

The President's FY '07 budget request provides the resources necessary to fulfill our priority that service members' transition from active duty military status to civilian life is as smooth and seamless as possible.

Men and women still on active duty will find it easier to access VA benefits when they near the end of their military service because of a program that allows early application for disability claims and other benefits. VA staff are located at 140 military installations around the nation, as well as in Korea and Germany, to assist active duty service members in applying for benefits before they separate from military service.

Applications from separating service members are now processed at two locations to improve efficiency and the consistency of our claims decisions.

In health care, VA has already facilitated transfers from military medical facilities to VA medical centers of several thousand injured service members returning from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

### World-Class Health Care

The President's FY '07 budget proposal requests \$34.3 billion for VA's health care program. This is an increase of \$3.5 billion (or 11.3 percent) more than 2006 — the largest increase in VA's medical care funding ever requested by a President. It is 69 percent more than the FY '01 enacted budget in place at the beginning of the administration.

*Georgia Veterans...guardians of liberty*

With these resources, VA will be able to treat an estimated 5.3 million patients. In 2007, 79 percent of all veteran patients are expected to be high priority — those veterans who count on VA the most (Priority 1-6 veterans).

The President's budget request also includes \$457 million to continue the recommendations of the 2004 Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) report designed to modernize VA's health care system. The FY '07 proposal brings the total Department investment to date to almost \$3 billion. This historic transformation means that VA will be able to provide greater access to high-quality care well into the future.

VA's health care system continues to be the nation's leader in delivering safe, accessible, and high-quality care that sets the national benchmark for excellence in health care. Last year the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical Association* noted that VA's health care system "has quickly emerged as a bright star in the constellation of safety practice, with system-wide implementation of safe practices, training programs and the establishment of four patient-safety research centers."

In addition, for the sixth consecutive year, VA has set the public and private sector standard for health care satisfaction on the American Customer Satisfaction Index conducted by the National Quality Research Center at the University of Michigan. Patients included in the study gave VA health care higher marks than those received by private-sector facilities.

### Responding Financially to Disabled Veterans

The President's budget proposal for FY '07 will enable VA to address the large growth in the number and complexity of claims for compensation and pension benefits, while at the same time increasing the processing accuracy of our most challenging compensation claims.

The budget includes funds for these disability payments to nearly 3.7 million veterans in FY '07, or more than 7 percent above the number at the end of FY '05.

Key program improvements will affect both the education and

vocational rehabilitation and employment programs. The timeliness of processing original education claims will improve by eight days during the next two years, falling from 33 days in FY '05 to 25 days in FY '07. In addition, VA will increase the percentage of disabled veterans successfully completing the vocational rehabilitation and employment program.

### Cemeteries are National Shrines

With the resources requested in the FY '07 budget, VA will expand access to national and state veterans' cemeteries. The Department will increase the percentage of veterans served by a burial option in a national or state veterans cemetery within 75 miles of their residence to nearly 84 percent.

The FY '07 budget proposal calls for \$161 million in operations and maintenance funding for national cemeteries, an increase of \$11 million (or 7.4 percent) over the level for FY '06. These additional resources will ensure VA continues to meet the burial needs of veterans and maintain its national cemeteries as shrines dedicated to preserving our nation's history and honoring veterans' service and sacrifice.

### Highlights for Provisions

The President's FY '07 budget includes two provisions that will further ensure VA is able to care for those veterans who count on it the most by asking other non-disabled, higher income veterans (Priority 7 and 8 veterans) to pay a \$250 annual enrollment fee and higher pharmacy co-payments (from \$8 to \$15).

These veterans were not eligible to receive VA medical care at all, or only on a case-by-case space available basis, until 1999 when new authority allowed VA to enroll them in any year that resource levels permitted. They typically have other alternatives for addressing their medical care costs, including third-party health insurance coverage and Medicare, and the provisions would ask those enrolled for VA care today to assume a modest share of the cost of their care.

Under no circumstances will a veteran make a co-payment of any kind for the treatment of a service-connected condition.



# Last Year, VA Spent Over \$2 Billion in Georgia

GDVS News Release, February 2006

According to fiscal year figures recently obtained from the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Georgia veterans who qualified under federal law shared in over \$2.05 billion in VA benefits during 2005.

“VA funds for Georgia veterans and their dependents who qualified have again increased by another \$140 million or so over the previous year,” says Commissioner Pete Wheeler.

The Commissioner points out, “This is especially good news for those veterans and dependents living on fixed incomes because these payments are tax exempt.” The FY 2005 figures showed a one year increase of 9.3 % in federal VA dollars into Georgia. The increase included about \$72 million in additional health care assistance, some \$85.6 million more in pension and compensation money, and an increase of about \$13 million in

education benefits.

During 2005, some 163,000 Georgia veterans received health care through the VA Medical Centers and Outpatient Clinics located in the state.

Currently, there are more than 126,000 veterans, surviving spouses and dependents being paid benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. As of September 2005, VA estimates Georgia’s veteran population at 758,963.

## USERRA Regulations Strengthen Old Law

*Army Times  
January, 2006*

The U.S. Department of Labor has issued new rules spelling out the rights and responsibilities of returning Guard and reserve members – and their employers.

The rules are designed to help enforce a law that has been on the books for 11 years. This is the first clarification of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, known as USERRA, since that law was enacted in 1994.

The 266-page document includes a large section in question-and-answer format starting on page 177.

The regulations explain how USERRA protects against discrimination and retaliation because of military

service and gives service members time to report back to jobs following completion of service obligations.

An employer may not discriminate against a person because of his or her status as a service member or a veteran – regardless of whether the status includes performance of military duties.

Labor Department officials also are publishing the final version of the notice it provides to employers informing them of their rights, benefits and obligations under USERRA.

That notice, as well as posters that can be downloaded, also are on the Web site. The new regulations can be found at [www.dol.gov/vets](http://www.dol.gov/vets).

## GovBenefits.com

Did you know there is a benefit and assistance resource available to veterans and their families that is open 24-hours-a-day and is completely free?

GovBenefits.gov is the official benefits Web site of the U.S. Government, connects veterans to more than 1,000 Federally funded government benefit programs. The Web site ([www.GovBenefits.gov](http://www.GovBenefits.gov)) features a questionnaire that helps veterans, other military personnel, and dependents find benefit programs they may not have known they were eligible to receive.

The questionnaire is one of four benefits search mechanisms that provide easy access to programs and contact information for active and inactive military personnel, such as Armed Forces Tax benefits, Housing Counseling Assistance, Local veterans Employment Representative Program, Disabled Veterans Outreach, a variety of scholarships, loans and more.

GovBenefits.com is a partnership of 16 Federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is managed by the U.S. Department of Labor. GovBenefits.gov has attracted more than 19 million visitors and generated 4 million citizens referrals to benefit programs tailored to their needs.

## *“Supermarket” 2005 Highlights*

# Annual Event Another Great Success

*GDVS News Release  
December, 2005*

With more than 3,100 veterans and their families taking part, Commissioner Wheeler termed the 2005 “Supermarket of Veterans Benefits” held in Savannah on Wednesday, December 7th “one of the most successful we have had in recent years.”

The one-day program took place at the Georgia National Guard Armory on Eisenhower Drive and provided a one-stop shopping service for veterans and their families to gather information regarding federal and state benefits to which they might be entitled.

“We are extremely happy that we were able to assist so many veterans and their dependents today,” said Commissioner Wheeler. “This program is extremely helpful for the veterans because so many different government agencies are assembled at a single location and claims are filed on the spot.”

Approximately 1,950 claims were processed Wednesday.

“Many of these claimants will be receiving benefits for the first time, and some of them had no idea that they were eligible for anything,” Wheeler pointed out.

The event, the 40<sup>th</sup> since its inception in 1966, is sponsored annually by the Georgia Department of Veterans Service in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and some 25 state, federal, and local agencies directly or indirectly involved with veterans’ affairs. It marked the fifth time that it has been held in Savannah.

“This is an excellent example of team effort and cooperation when so many different government agencies can be assembled at the same time in one

location to allow a veteran to file a claim right on the spot,” commented Commissioner Wheeler. “Over the years more than 148,900 veterans have been helped through this event.”

Since the Georgia Department of Veterans Service originated this program in Columbus, GA, in 1966, veteran benefits’ “Supermarkets” have also been conducted in other cities (Albany, Athens, Atlanta, Augusta, Brunswick, Dalton, Gainesville, Griffin, Macon, Rome, Savannah, Valdosta, and Waycross) across the state.





# December 7 is "Supermarket of Veterans Benefits Day"

Savannah Tribune  
November 23, 2005

On Wednesday, November 16, Georgia Commissioner of Veterans Affairs Pete Wheeler, leaders of the local veteran's organizations and auxiliaries, and representatives of participating agencies met with Savannah Mayor Otis Johnson in Council Chambers at City Hall for the signing of a proclamation designating December 7, 2005, as "Supermarket of Veterans Benefits Day."

The "Supermarket of Veterans Benefits" will be held at the Georgia National Guard Armory at 1248 Eisenhower Drive, Wednesday, December 7, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The event is co-sponsored by the Georgia Department of Veterans Service and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The "Supermarket of Veterans Benefits" brings together representatives from federal, state, and local agencies involved with providing benefits to veterans and their dependents. The "Supermarket" provides veterans and their dependents with the opportunity to gather information and get assistance in all areas relating to benefits at one time in one location. The Georgia Department of Veterans Service originated these one-day programs have been held annually at various locations throughout the state. This will be the fifth time Savannah has hosted the Supermarket.



## Next generation

### WWII retirees seeing you

By Russ Bynum  
Associated Press Writer

SAVANNAH — The gray-haired war veterans waiting in line for benefits advisers could easily overlook 29-year-old Staff Sgt. Douglas Piper, dressed in blue jeans and a striped shirt, as one of their own.

That is until they look Piper in the face and see the acrylic disc he wears in place of the right eye he lost to a grenade explosion in Iraq.

Some of the older guys were in Korea and World

War II, they're all and I tell them I'm too," said Piper, a Ranger wounded in dad in 2003. "The me kind of funny, strange, being you. The annual benefit held by the Georgia Department of Veterans Service still draws mostly from generations who Vietnam and prior young veterans who in Iraq and Afghanistan turning out in numbers.

At the Army Guard Armory in

## Benefits

Continued from Page 1B

Commissioner Pete Wheeler wasn't surprised to see a number of new veterans in Savannah, where thousands of troops have deployed to war from Hunter Army Airfield and nearby Fort Stewart.

"I talked to one soldier from Hunter this morning — he was the first one here, I think," Wheeler said. "No veteran's benefit is automatic. They've all got to be applied for. And we're here to



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Douglas Piper, center, talks with a benefit adviser at the Georgia Department of Veterans Service. Piper, a Ranger wounded in Iraq, lost his right eye to a grenade explosion in 2003. He is one of many new veterans who are coming to the Supermarket of Veterans Benefits to get help with their benefits.



Savannah Morning News  
Coastal Empire  
December 8, 2005



**PURPOSE:** Acts and omissions which have served in the armed forces of the United States are

**REMARKS:** It is very important for these returning veterans to know about the various benefits that are available to them, particularly in the areas of education, job training, employment, medical and hospitalization, and

**REMARKS:** These benefits which are due to our nation's veterans of all wars, their dependents and survivors, often are administered by various agencies in which reported benefits, making dissemination of eligibility and the filing of claims somewhat difficult, cumbersome, and time-consuming, and

**PURPOSE:** One of the reasons for the well-being of veterans and their families, besides of federal, state and local agencies will bring representatives of their various organizations to the National Guard Armory in Savannah, Georgia, from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., Wednesday, December 7, 2005, to counsel with veterans and their families about the various benefits which may be due to them and to help them to receive their benefits.

**WITNESSES:** I, Otto E. Johnson, Mayor of the City of Savannah, do hereby proclaim this Proclamation, December 7, 2005.

"SUPERMARKET OF VETERANS BENEFITS DAY"

In Savannah, and in all our cities to recognize the efforts being made by officials of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and other agencies on behalf of our veterans and their families.



By Order of the Mayor, I have caused this Proclamation to be signed by the City of Savannah, Georgia, to be attested.

Signature of Otto E. Johnson  
December 7, 2005





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National Savannah,

set up for one-stop benefits shopping, they browsed tables seeking Montgomery GI Bill support for college, job training, state tax breaks and federal medical and disability services.

"If you go to Web sites for Veterans Affairs, there's a lot of gibber jabber," said Piper, who's preparing paperwork for disability benefits after 2½ years of reconstructive surgery and recovery. "These guys put it in layman's terms."

Georgia Veterans Service

See Benefits, Page 3B



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Douglas Piper talks with a benefit manager Wednesday during the annual benefits expo in Savannah. The expo still draws mostly older generations who served in Vietnam and prior wars, but young veterans are turning out in increasing numbers.

The Associated Press

December 8, 2005

Marietta Daily Journal

## Young vets seek benefits alongside older generations

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — The gray-haired war veterans waiting in line for benefits advisers could easily overlook 25-year-old Staff Sgt. Douglas Piper, dressed in his jeans and a striped shirt, as one of their own.

That is until they look Piper in the eyes and see the acrylic disc he wears in place of the right eye he lost in a grenade explosion in Iraq.

"Some of the older guys were in Korea and World War II, they're all retired, and I tell them I'm retired," Piper said. "I'm not retired, I'm still in the Army."

Piper, an Army Ranger who served in Vietnam and prior wars, but young veterans are turning out in increasing numbers.

At the Army National Guard stop benefits shopping, they learned support for college, job training, state tax breaks and federal medical and disability services.

"If you go to web sites for Veterans Affairs, there's a lot of gibber jabber," Piper said, while preparing paperwork for disability benefits after 2½ years of reconstructive surgery and recovery. "These guys put it in layman's terms."

Georgia Veterans Service Coordinator Pete Wheeler said: "I've never seen a number of new veterans in Savannah, where thousands of troops have deployed to war from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard."

He said to see a soldier from the first war here, I think, Wheeler said. "No veteran's benefit is automatic."

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"They've all got to be applied for. And we have to show them how."

In some cases, even the federal government has underestimated how many soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan would seek services.

Wheeler said this year, the Veterans Affairs Department said \$250 million of a \$1.2 billion budget shortfall for veterans' health care was due to higher demand from service members returning from the two latest wars.

The VA had predicted 23,000 veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan would need its services, but later said the number was 103,000.

Still, some young veterans hesitate to seek services, particularly for psychological or emotional problems, said Danett Jones, a readjustment counseling worker for the VA Medical Center in Charleston, S.C.

"It was hard for me to accept any kind of psychological help. Someone had to tell me, 'Hey, stop, group and check yourself,'" said Jones, who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan before leaving the Army this year. "I try to inform them on the signs and symptoms of what to look for."

Sgt. Paul Tucker, 38, said the expo to know for incentives as the Iraq veteran prepares to begin a civilian life after 20 years in the Army.

He plans to use the GI Bill to return to college, and is considering getting a commercial driver's license and possibly joining the Postal Service.

"What I'm trying to do is keep my options open," Tucker said. "It's going to be a long haul. For the last 20 years, the military has been my life."

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Still, some young veterans hesitate to seek services, particularly for psychological or emotional problems, said Danett Jones, a readjustment counseling worker for the VA Medical Center in Charleston, S.C.

"It was hard for me to accept any kind of psychological help. Someone had to tell me, 'Hey, stop, group and check yourself,'" said Jones, who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan before leaving the Army this year. "I try to inform them on the signs and symptoms of what to look for."

Sgt. Paul Tucker, 38, said the expo to know for incentives as the Iraq veteran prepares to begin a civilian life after 20 years in the Army.

He plans to use the GI Bill to return to college, and is considering getting a commercial driver's license and possibly joining the Postal Service.

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show them how."

In some cases, even the federal government has underestimated how many soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan would seek services.

Earlier this year, the Veterans Affairs Department said \$250 million of a \$1.2 billion budget shortfall for veterans' health care was due to higher demand from service members returning from the two latest wars.

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## Iraq vets seek benefits alongside older generations

By Ross Brown  
The Associated Press

SAVANNAH — The gray-haired war veterans waiting in line for benefits advisers could easily overlook 25-year-old Staff Sgt. Douglas Piper, dressed in his jeans and a striped shirt, as one of their own.

That is until they look Piper in the eyes and see the acrylic disc he wears in place of the right eye he lost in a grenade explosion in Iraq.

"Some of the older guys were in Korea and World War II, they're all retired, and I tell them I'm retired, too," said Piper, an Army Ranger who served in Vietnam and prior wars, but young veterans are turning out in increasing numbers.

At the Army National Guard stop benefits shopping, they learned support for college, job training, state tax breaks and federal medical and disability services.

"If you go to web sites for Veterans Affairs, there's a lot of gibber jabber," said Piper, who's preparing paperwork for disability benefits after 2½ years of reconstructive surgery and recovery. "These guys put it in layman's terms."

Georgia Veterans Service Coordinator Pete Wheeler said: "I've never seen a number of new veterans in Savannah, where thousands of troops have deployed to war from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard."



Hundreds of veterans line up on Wednesday during the annual benefits expo held by the Georgia Department of Veterans Services in Savannah. The one-stop benefits expo still draws mostly older generations who served in Vietnam and prior wars, but young veterans who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan are turning out in increasing numbers.

He wasn't surprised to see a number of new veterans in Savannah, where thousands of troops have deployed to war from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard.

"I talked to one soldier from Hunter this morning — he was the first one here, I think," Wheeler said. "No veteran's benefit is automatic. They've all got to be applied for. And we've here to show them how."

He said to see a soldier from the first war here, I think, Wheeler said. "No veteran's benefit is automatic."

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Rockdale Citizen  
December 8, 2005





Georgia Veterans...guardians of liberty





*Last Thanksgiving, residents of the Georgia War Veterans Home in Augusta received a wonderful gift from more than 20 Medical College of Georgia students and a senior Girl Scout Priya Gulati, a nursing home volunteer whose mother is the home's medical director. The mural entitled "From sea to shining sea," is located on a back wall, just a few feet from the nursing home's dining hall windows. The picture is a spanning view of the United States, starting with the Pacific Ocean on the left and continuing across to the Atlantic.*

## VAMC Augusta's Active Duty Rehabilitation Unit Wins Teague Award

Last Fall, the 25<sup>th</sup> annual Olin E. Teague Award was presented to the staff of the Augusta VA Medical Center involved in working with local Army counterparts to develop the first ever Active Duty Rehabilitation Unit in support of servicemembers injured on active duty. VA Secretary Jim Nicholson (center) presented the award, the highest VA honor recognizing employee dedication and excellence in the rehabilitation of combat-injured veterans, at an October ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. This innovation developed by members of the Augusta VAMC and Eisenhower Army Medical Center at Fort Gordon brought VA and Army resources to bear on assisting the medical rehabilitation of military personnel on medical hold while recuperating from combat injuries. In attendance for the presentation by VA Secretary Nicholson and VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Jonathan Perlin (far left) to Mr. James Trusley III (third from left), Augusta VAMC Medical Director were Eisenhower Army Medical Center staff



(left to right) Jan Whaley, Captain Daniel Bloebaum, Captain Vince Meyers, BG Eric Shoomaker, and Captain David Carter. The VAMC unit maintains 30 inpatient beds and 30 outpatient supported residential beds with specialized outpatient rehab programs. In addition to physical rehabilitation, the unit focuses on quality of life with support from chaplains, social workers, PTSD counselors and local veteran service organizations. Since February 2004, the unit has treated more than 200 servicemembers.

# Veterans' Health Care Outscores Private Sector

VA News Release  
January, 2006

Veterans continue to be more satisfied with their health care than the average American, according to an annual report on customer satisfaction that compares the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system with private-sector health care.

The ratings came in the annual American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), which ranks "customer satisfaction" with various federal programs and private-sector industries.

"Although VA has received many wonderful endorsements recently, the support of our veterans – the people who know us best – is the highest praise,"

said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "This is a testament to the hard work of VA employees, the support of Congress and the leadership of the White House."

The ACSI, an independent survey of customer satisfaction within both the federal and private sectors, gave VA's inpatient care a rating of 83 on a 100-point scale. That's 10 percentage points higher than the 73 rating achieved for inpatient care by the private-sector health care industry.

VA's rating of 80 for outpatient care was five percentage points higher than the 75 rating for private-sector outpatient care and

nine percentage points higher than the average satisfaction rating for all federal services.

The latest findings mark the sixth consecutive year VA's health care system has outranked the private sector for customer satisfaction.

"VA provides world-class health care for our veterans," said Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin, VA's Under Secretary for Health. "The ACSI ratings confirm that our veterans recognize the dedicated service of VA's health care professionals."

Since 1994, the ACSI survey has been a national measurement of customer satisfaction with the quality of goods and services in the United States. ACSI produces indices of satisfaction for seven economic sectors, 41 industries, 200 private-sector companies and two types of local government services.

VA's strong showing came after interviews with veterans who have recently used the Department's services. The report is the product of the National Quality Research Center at the University of Michigan Business School, the CFI group, and the Federal Consulting Group.

Health care is just one of many potential benefits available to those who served in our nation's armed forces. If you served, or know someone who did, check on eligibility for benefits and services from VA at: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or call 1-800-827-1

## The History of President's Day

The original version of the holiday was in commemoration of George Washington's birthday in 1796 (the last full year of his presidency).

Washington, according to the calendar that has been used at least since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, was born on February 22 1732. According to the old style calendar in use back then, he was born on February 11<sup>th</sup>. At least in 1796, many Americans celebrated his birthday on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, while others marked the occasion on the 11<sup>th</sup> instead.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Washington's Birthday had taken firm root in the American Experience as a bona fide national holiday. Its traditions included Birthnight Balls, in various regions, speeches and receptions given by prominent public figures, and a lot of revelry in taverns throughout the land.

Then Along came Abraham Lincoln, another revered president and fellow February baby (born on the 12<sup>th</sup> of the month). The first formal observance of his birthday took place in 1865, the year

after his assassination, when both houses of Congress gathered for a memorial address. While Lincoln's birthday did not become a federal holiday like George Washington's it did become a legal holiday in several states.

In 1968, legislation (HR 15951) was enacted that affected several holidays. One of these was Washington's Birthday, the observation of which was shifted to the third Monday in February each year, whether or not it fell on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. This act, which took effect in 1971, was designed to simplify the yearly calendar of holidays and give federal employees some standard three-day weekends in the process.

Apparently, while the holiday in February is still officially known as Washington's birthday (at least according to the Office of Personnel Management), it has become popularly (and, perhaps in some cases at the state level, legally) known as "President's Day". This has made the third Monday in February a day for honoring both Washington and Lincoln, as well as all the other men who have served as president.



# New Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage

**A**t the beginning of this year, new Medicare Prescription plans were available to all people with Medicare. Here are the basic facts about the program:

- Medicare prescription drugs plan will provide insurance coverage for prescription drugs (brand name and generic). Like other insurance, people will pay a monthly premium (generally \$37 per month in 2006) and a yearly deductible (up to the first \$250 in 2006). You will also pay a share of the cost of your prescriptions. Costs will vary depending on the drug plan chosen.
- In order to get the coverage, people must enroll in a Medicare prescription drug plan between November 15, 2005- May 15, 2006. If you joined December 31, 2005 then coverage began January 1, 2006.
- If an eligible person doesn't join a plan by May 15, 2006, and you don't have a drug plan that covers as much or more than a Medicare prescription drug plan, your premium will increase 1% per month for each month you enroll after May 15, 2006. So even if you don't use a lot of prescription drugs now, you should consider joining a plan.
- Financial assistance is available to help pay for the coverage for the

people with limited income:

individuals or married couples with income less than 150% of poverty.

- Drug coverage from TRICARE, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), or the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHB): As long as you still qualify, your TRICARE, VA FEHB prescription drug coverage is not changing. You should contact your benefits administrator or FEHB insurer for information about your TRICARE, VA or FEHB coverage before making changes. It will almost always be to your advantage to keep you current coverage without any changes.

If you lose your TRICARE, VA or FEHB coverage and you join a Medicare drug plan after May 15, 2006, in most cases you won't have to pay a penalty, as long as you join within 63 days of losing your coverage.

What should individuals receiving Medicare do?

- Apply for financial assistance if you think you might qualify. Contact the Social Security Administration: [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) or 1-800-722-1213
- Read the *Medicare & You 2006* handbook that was sent this fall. It will list the Medicare prescription drug plans available in your area.

Information is also available at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) or by calling 1800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

Under most circumstances, there is no added value for VA health care enrollees to purchase Medicare prescription drug coverage. The exception to this general rule may be for those veterans who wish to have additional prescription access options and who have the resources to pay the additional costs associated with Medicare's Part D coverage. Because VA is creditable coverage for its health care enrollees, veterans who chose not to enroll in Medicare Part D plan before May 15, 2006, do not have to pay the late enrollment penalty if they enroll in a Medicare drug plan during a later enrollment period.

A veteran who is, or who becomes, a patient or inmate in an institution of another government agency (for example, a state veterans home, a state mental institution, a jail, or a corrections facility), may not have creditable coverage from VA while in that institution. Veterans who are unsure whether this may apply to them should contact the institution reside, the VA Health Benefits Service Center at 1-877-222-VETS (8387), or their local VA medical facility or explore [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) for more information.

## VA Can Help As A Locator

The U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service is limited, by law, to the extent that it can help locate a veteran.

"The VA will try to forward a letter to a veteran," Commissioner Wheeler commented. "However, it is up to the veteran to contact the sender of the letter if the veteran so desires."

The proper procedure is to write a letter to the veteran and place it in an unsealed envelope, bearing the veteran's name, with sufficient postage to cover mailing costs. A cover letter to the VA should be included, giving as much information as possible about the veteran, such as his full name, date of birth, last known address, service serial number, VA claim number if known, social security number, last military address, rank and date of discharge.

The request packet should be mailed to VA Regional Office - Atlanta, Attention: Privacy Act Office (211D), 1700 Clairmont Road, Decatur, Georgia 30330.

If the address is located, the VA will put it on the envelope and forward the letter to the veteran. Should no information be available or the letter is returned to the VA, the writer's original letter, but not the envelope, will be sent back to the requestor by the VA.

"Letters will not be forwarded to aid in the collection of debts or for the purpose of canvassing, harassing or propaganda," Commissioner Wheeler pointed out. "Nor will a letter be forwarded if the contents might be harmful to the physical or mental health of the intended recipient."

Anyone desiring to locate a veteran whose address is unknown may get assistance in following these procedures by contacting any office of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service.

*Georgia Commission on the Holocaust*  
***Cordially invites you to attend the Official State Observance***  
**“A Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust”**  
**Friday, April 28, 2006 at 12 Noon**  
**State Capitol Building Rotunda**  
**Atlanta**

**Veterans will be recognized and honored**

## **Higher Limits Extended in VA Home Loan Program**

*VA News Release  
December 2005*

America's veterans and their families now have a greater chance to make their dreams of home ownership a reality, thanks to an increase in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) home loan guaranty limit.

Effective January 1, 2006, changes in the loan guaranty limits means that veterans are able to get no-down payment loans up to \$417,000. The previous ceiling was \$359,650.

The Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004 tied increases in the VA guaranty to increases in the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation's conforming loan limit. When this limit increases, VA guaranty limits also go up, allowing VA to keep pace with rising home values.

VA-guaranteed home loans are made by banks and mortgage companies to veterans, service members and reservists. With VA guaranteeing a portion of the loan, veterans can receive a competitive interest rate without making a down payment, making it easier to buy a home.

More information about VA home loan benefits is available on the Web at <http://www.homeloans.va.gov> or by calling 1-800-827-1000.

## **More GI Bill Money Now Available to National Guard and Reserve**

*GDVS News Release*

Georgia's Guardsmen and Reservists activated after September 11, 2001 who take advantage of their GI Bill benefits can now receive an increase in the amount paid to them monthly.

“But this benefit is not automatic,” notes Commissioner Pete Wheeler. “Eligible individuals must apply for this increase in their monthly GI Bill payments by submitting an application and supporting documents.”

Commissioner Wheeler points out that besides being activated after 9/11, the veteran must have served on active duty at least 90 consecutive days and must currently remain in a Guard or Reserve status.

The new program titled the Reserve Educational Assistance Program was established under the provisions of the FY 2005 National Defense Authorization Act.

The monthly allowance payable under REAP is a percentage of the Active Duty GI Bill's benefit rate based on the number of days served in a active duty status. Participants can receive 36 monthly GI Bill payments.

Commissioner Wheeler encourages veterans who believe they might be eligible, or those needing assistance in

filing for this increase, to visit our nearest Veterans Service field office (office locations and phone numbers listed in the local telephone directory) or contact the department's State Approving Agency at (404) 656-2306 (email at [saaga@mindspring.com](mailto:saaga@mindspring.com)).

## **DoD to Restrict Cell Phone Use on Military Bases**

*American Forces Information Service*

Defense Department installations have begun implementing new cell phone restrictions for drivers on military bases. Anyone driving motor vehicle on a DoD installation cannot use a cell phone unless the vehicle is safely parked or the driver is using a hands-free device.

“Many installation already have implemented the new restrictions, and the rest will implement the rules on their own schedule,” said John Seibert, assistant for safety, health and fire protection for DoD. “There is no deadline for installations to implement the restrictions,” Seibert said, but he expects most will do so this year. “We have not issued an implementation schedule,” he added.

Seibert stated that as the installations implement the restrictions, they have a responsibility to notify the public by putting up signs or putting notices in base newspapers.



## Memorial Day 2006

# National Moment of Remembrance

The *National Moment of Remembrance*, established by Congress, asks Americans wherever they are at 3 p.m., local time, on Memorial Day, May 29, 2006 to pause in an act of national unity (duration: one minute). The time 3 p.m. was chosen because it is the time when most Americans are enjoying their freedoms on the national holiday. The *Moment* does not replace traditional Memorial Day events; rather it is an act of national unity in which all Americans, alone or with family and friends, honor those who died for our freedom. It will help to reclaim Memorial Day as the sacred and noble holiday it was meant to be. In this shared remembrance, we connect as Americans.

### How to Participate

Wherever you are, observe the *Moment* at 3 p.m., local time, on Memorial Day. Ask others to remember—relatives, friends, church, neighborhood, or co-workers to observe the *Moment* at places such as your neighborhood, local pool, picnic grounds, etc., for one minute of Remembrance. Participation can be informal as ringing a bell three times to signify the *Moment*.



### Why?

To provide a time of Remembrance for America's fallen and to make a commitment to give something back to our country in their memory.

To have Americans participate in an act of national unity and demonstrate gratitude and respect for those who died for freedom since the founding of our Nation.

To provide a sense of history to our citizens and ensure that younger generations understand the sacrifices made to preserve our liberties.

### Background

The idea for the *Moment* was born when children touring the Nation's Capital were asked by the Commission's Director what Memorial Day means. They responded, "That's the day the pool opens." A Gallup Poll revealed that only 28% of Americans know the meaning of this noble holiday.

The White House Commission on Remembrance was established by Congress (PL 106-579) to promote the values of Memorial Day by acts of remembrance throughout the year. The major initiative of the Commission is the *National Moment of Remembrance*.

THE MYSTIC CORDS OF MEMORY, STRETCHING  
FROM EVERY BATTLEFIELD AND PATRIOT GRAVE  
TO EVERY LIVING HEART... SHOULD SWELL INTO  
A MIGHTY CHORUS OF REMEMBRANCE.  
GRATITUDE AND REDEDICATION ON THIS  
SOLEMN OCCASION.

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

# ***Attention VSOs!***

***2006 Service Officers School  
May 16-19  
Holiday Inn  
200 S. Beachview Drive  
Jekyll Island, Georgia 31527  
(912) 635-3311***

## **THE AGENDA**

### Wednesday May 17, 2006

#### Tuesday May 16, 2006

1:30 p.m. Registration

9:00 a.m. Compensation-Pension-Education Benefits Panel  
1:30 p.m. Employment- Reemployment-Civil Service Preference Panel  
3:00 p.m. Military Retirements Benefits-National Cemetery System-  
Social Security-TRICARE Benefits Panel

### Thursday May 18, 2006

9:00 a.m. Hospital-Medical Benefits Panel  
1:30 p.m. Loan Benefits Panel  
3:00 p.m. Insurance Panel

### Friday May 19, 2006

9:00 a.m. Legal-Appeals Panel  
12 Noon Adjourn

**Guestroom-\$79 (Please make reservations early, rooms may not be available after April 17, 2006.)**

**Georgia Department of Veterans Service  
Floyd Veterans Memorial Building E-970  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334-4800**

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## **Georgia Veterans Bulletin**

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Ray Hendrix	Chairman, Veterans Service Board
Pete Wheeler	Commissioner
Jim Frederick	Assistant Commissioner, Claims and Field Services
Len Glass	Assistant Commissioner, Administrative Service
James Jackson	Director, Education & Training
Brian Zeringue	Public Information Manager
Shelly-Ann Simpson	Editor, Veterans Bulletin